

Report from District Councillor Cottle-Hunkin (precis given at the meeting)

Full Council:

Roads:

The following notice of motion was proposed and voted through unanimously regarding the state of our roads here in Torridge, and the council also invited the leader and chief executive of Devon County Council to come and visit us to see how comfortable they feel driving along some of our roads in their own cars. We are yet to hear back...

“This council raises concern with Devon County Council over the level of maintenance of the highways, especially our ‘A’ routes and footpaths, across Torridge District. This goes beyond potholes, but into wider issues such as surface water drains, road markings, cats eyes and general pathway maintenance.

We have concerns over the apparent lack of response to issues reported via DCC reporting systems, and the lack of clarity on maintenance levels across both our urban and rural areas. Here in Torridge the poor state of our roads and footpaths is resulting in considerable worry from residents over safety, even in regular weather conditions. This is leaving people feeling isolated and disconnected from vital services. At our budget meeting tonight we hear that 72% of our council tax goes to DCC and we are concerned that we are not getting the highways we need and pay for.

I propose we send a letter to DCC Highways raising our concerns and invite them to come to our External O&S committee to explain the policies and organisation they have in place for the maintenance of roads and footpaths in Torridge and explore options to overcome admitted service shortfall.“

Council tax:

Torridge Full Council Council voted to increase council tax in line with recommendations, but it’s important to note that the bulk of council tax (72%) goes to Devon County Council with only 8% retained by Torridge.

Devolution proposal- Devon and Torbay Combined Authority:

There were huge concerns raised that the districts are not being given fair representation and there’s a bias in favour of Torbay. We highlighted the fact that Torridge already feels forgotten by Devon County and we don’t believe this will change going forward, especially given our lack of voting rights within the County Combined Authority. There were comments made by district councillors last evening that it was a “talking shop” and a “farce”.

The public consultation is open to everyone to respond (including parish councils collectively) and the deadline is 24th March.

Southwest Water:

TDC and NDDC had a meeting with Southwest Water and we were horrified to find out that they do not measure the volume of sewage going into our rivers and seas at all, all they measure is a start/stop time which doesn’t really tell us a lot to be honest as it could be a trickle or it could be blasting sewage into them.

We also raised concerns over bathing water quality. Current policies are to only monitor at a certain time of year (so-called bathing season). But we know in reality that people are swimming in the sea all year round because of the health benefits it brings (but not if the water is full of sewage!)

SWW talked about their management plans and investment. This included desalination plants in Cornwall, pumping from rivers to storage reservoirs, and a potential new reservoir near Bristol.

External O&S:

Active Torridge- talking about their progress since setting up the council-owned company. Active Torridge runs the leisure centres at Holsworthy and Northam and the pool in Torrington. Northam gym is pretty much full to capacity for gym and classes, so plans are in place to set up a gym in Bideford “the old library”.

Lendology CIC- worked in partnership with TDC since 2008, providing home-improvement loans with only 4% interest, open to anyone regardless of income. It all sounded really positive so please spread the word.

Councillor grants:

We are really pleased to be using our councillor grants to fully fund a project organised by Appledore Book Festival which is providing sessions for all three of the local schools in our ward (Shebbear, Langtree and Clinton, Merton) where authors will be going into the schools to inspire the children, and they will all go home with a signed book free of charge.

We are also hoping to support the purchase of a shed for outdoor toys to be stored by tea and tots at the chapel.

Petrockstowe station:

The small plaque has now been installed at Petrockstowe station commemorating the first and last passenger and station master. Pete Cain who organised this would be happy to have a small unveiling together with members of the parish council, and also has a memory board linked to the plaque, showing the "behind the scenes".

Church forum:

Obviously everyone is aware of the upcoming open forum this Saturday 23rd March. The hope from this is that we can then create a small working group to move forward with plans and applications for an alternative use of the church building.

I have already had expressions of interest from a couple of people, including my friend Emily Wapshott, she has tonnes of experience in protecting historic buildings and will be a great asset to the group. I have also spoken to officers at TDC who attended the previous meeting we had re the church and they are keen to help with grant applications etc once a working group is established.

Report from County Councillor Saywell (provided in his absence)

DCC Budgets – I am pleased to report the projected overspend on general expenditure for the outgoing 2023-24 financial year has fallen by a further £4.3m and is now down to just £291,000, effectively a break even position. I would hope that will fall to zero by the month end. This again is a strong achievement by the Council and has meant that we have not had to raid reserves to set this year's budget, or get ourselves into the financial situation that Somerset are experiencing...

For the incoming financial year, the Budget meeting was held on the 15th February and agreed. The overall revenue budget is set to increase to £743 million. Adult Care and Health gets a 6% (£20.5m) increase with an overall budget of just under £361m. Children's Services gets a £21.5m increase of 10.4% for a budget of just under £228m.

The Highways and Transport Directorate gets a more modest 4.7% increase of £3.9m... but that is still welcome!

In addition, the final Central Government Financial Settlement was more generous than expected – a further £1.5m will go into Highways Drainage on top of the proposed budgets.

Councillor Locality Grants will also be increased from £5,000 back up to £8,000.

DCC's share of the Council Tax will increase by 4.99%, of which 2% is specifically ringfenced for Adult Social Care. I know Council Tax increases are never welcome... but it is needed to fund the continued demand on social services and Highways and to ensure the Council has a sound budget. The alternative is to take money out of reserves to prop up day to day expenditure... and if we did that it would weaken Devon's financial position and start getting the Council into the mess that other authorities like Somerset and Birmingham have got themselves into...

Devolution – The Devolution Deal for Devon and Torbay has now been published. The 40-page proposed Deal sets out in detail proposals that could see the transfer of powers and funding to a Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority, subject to approval by Devon and Torbay following a public consultation.

The proposed Combined County Authority would be a partnership made up of Councillors representing the councils of Devon and Torbay, including District Councils, and representatives from business and education. Together, that

partnership would deliver on a jointly agreed programme, working alongside a wide range of local stakeholders to tackle key local priorities.

The Government has chosen Devon and Torbay as one of only a small number of local authority areas in the country to form a Combined County Authority (CCA), that will **not** require an elected Mayor or changes to the current structure of local councils.

The Deal should allow important decisions to be taken locally by people who know their areas best, on priorities that matter to the people of Devon and Torrington Rural such as building more affordable homes, investing in new quality jobs and skills, and improving public transport.

Highlights of the proposal are:

- Direct control of adult education to create up to 50,000 new training and retraining opportunities by 2030
- Government transfer of over £16 million to invest in new green jobs, homes, skills, and business growth, and accelerate Devon and Torbay's transition to a net-zero economy
- Stronger partnership with Homes England to create a joint local action plan for affordable housing schemes for local people and reduce homelessness
- Even closer working between Devon and Torbay to improve the efficiency and co-ordination of public transport. There is an ambition to introduce a single ticketing system for travellers and investment in services to provide greater access to public transport
- Devon and Torbay would be responsible for developing, designing and delivering the next stages of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund from 2025
- Boosting and supporting high growth business sectors in Devon and Torbay, such as advanced marine engineering, defence, photonics and digital

The consultation remains ongoing. Some interesting feedback is being received from the District Councils... feedback from the business community so far is generally positive.

I am happy to talk about this in more detail when I am back but, if people are wondering what benefits we may get from Devolution, I happen to believe that had we had this set up in place already, it would not have taken 30 years to regenerate the old Creamery site by Taddipport... The combined authority would have, in conjunction with our District partners, the clout and access to funding to have unlocked the regeneration of that site a lot sooner than what it took in the present with our un-devolved structures.

More information about the Deal and the public consultation can be found online at www.devontorbaydeal.org.uk

Family Hub Consultation – The Council is changing the way that young families are supported at Children’s Centres, and is inviting those who use the services, as well as professionals and community groups, to help influence the changes. It follows a national move, announced by the Government last year, for Children’s Centres to become Family Hubs, as part of its Start for Life Programme initiative.

In Devon that means extending the age range, from current services that deliver targeted support to 0 to 8 year-olds, to future services that provide targeted and universal support to 0 to 19 year-olds, or up to 25 year-old young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

And it would mean a wider range of services than present, including support from local community groups, working together to help young families.

Having agreed at the end of last year to make the change in line with national thinking, Devon County Council is now inviting families, professionals and community groups to help shape what the new Family Hubs support network will look like in Devon.

Exactly which services will be integrated into a Family Hub will very much depend on the needs of local families. But the kind of services that families could access include early years services and education; Public Health Nursing and Midwifery services; activities delivered by local groups; drug, alcohol and domestic abuse support; mental health support and youth services.

So no, we are not talking about service cuts and/or reducing services, but expanding them and changing the way they are delivered. In particular I am keen to see engagement from young families in our rural areas because it shouldn't necessarily be the case that a family in Petrockstowe should be told to travel to a building in Bideford, for example, to access a service.

Family Hubs are likely to be located in areas of greatest need, with outreach services extending from them into local communities. I know from talking to the team they are still keen to use Great Torrington as a base. Much of the support families currently receive will still be available.

The consultation is available by visiting our [Have Your Say](https://www.devon.gov.uk/haveyoursay/consultations/family-hubs-engagement) webpage. www.devon.gov.uk/haveyoursay/consultations/family-hubs-engagement
The survey will run until March 23.

That's it for this month, as ever, any other issues please get in touch. See you in April.